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What Do Elon Musk and the Taliban Have in Common?

October 27, 2014 · AI, images, Politics, Religion, Unfriendly AI

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By: Jesucopter Crudslinger

What do Elon Musk and the Taliban have in common?

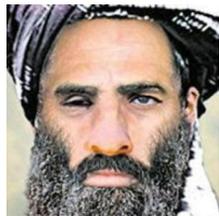
Until recently, one would have thought: Not much ... apart from both being fairly influential entities in the modern world.... Elon Musk, tech biz pioneer responsible for SpaceX, the Tesla car and so much more, couldn't possibly have much in common with a fundamentalist religious group intent on ridding the world of modern culture and technology — right?



Not quite...

Actually, due to some of Musk's recent comments on AI, a different answer is possible: *Both have equated advanced technologies they're afraid of, with Satan.*

No doubt, the Taliban got there first. Back in 2001 when they first hit the international news media big-time, they were draping trees with videotape pulled in fury from cassettes. Computers were "executed" with rifle butts to the



monitors. Advanced technology was viewed as closely associated with the Great Satan, the USA, and as a corrupting factor destructive to a traditionalist view of Islam. (These days many Taliban leaders are using advanced technology themselves to advance their cause, but that's another story. The Luddite attitude remains, as does the association of modern tech with America's Satanic ways.)

But now Musk is on record **equating AI development with demon-summoning:**

"With artificial intelligence we are summoning the demon. In all those stories where there's the guy with the pentagram and the holy water, it's like yeah he's sure he can control the demon. Didn't work out."



OK OK, I suppose Musk is being metaphorical, whereas the Taliban's casting of the US and its tech as Satanic is literal.

And there seems no reason to believe Musk is going to start killing people to enforce his beliefs. By all appearances he's a non-violent guy with a modern sense of ethics, which sets him pretty far apart from the Taliban. And in spite of his misgivings, he has invested in some AI companies, such as Dileep George's Vicarious Systems.

But still, the parallel is real. In both cases, one has an attitude rooted in fear of some new technology — and a

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reaction of labeling this new technology as Evil.

Hugo de Garis has forecast an **Artilect War** this century, a kind of WWII between Terrans who oppose advanced technology and Cosmists who advocate it. This is probably too simplistic of a futurological prediction. But one sees something conceptually similar emerging in the world today, with dichotomous attitudes on multiple levels:

- Fundamentalist religious folks — versus most of the developed world (which wants as much advanced tech as it can get). Not many fundies in the US oppose technology as strongly as the Taliban; but they do oppose human cloning, stem cell research and so forth, and almost surely will come out against AGI and cyborgization and mind uploading once these technologies advance further.
- Elon Musk, MIRI (the Machine Intelligence Research Institute in California, formerly the Singularity Institute for AI), FHI (Oxford's Future of Humanity Institute) and other "AI alarmists" — versus most of the futurist and technology community (which advocates advanced AI as a technology to be developed for broad benefit, with care as is needed for any dramatic new technology)

What kind of practical conflicts will emerge from these belief-level conflicts, remains unclear.

The Taliban is correct that advanced technology is a threat to traditional ways of thinking and living.

Musk is correct that advanced AI is a threat to humanity in its current form. The probability of AI extinguishing humanity seems to be massively overblown by paranoid futurists like Musk, MIRI and FHI who have watched too many SF movies. But the probability of advanced AI playing a role in a transformation of humanity into something radically different, seems reasonably high. Options like mind uploading and cyborgization seem almost inevitable, once you ponder them in a rational and open-minded way. And the odds of AI systems vastly exceeding human beings in general intelligence and overall capability, seem very close to 100%.

Elon, I'm sorry if you find AGI, mind uploading and cyborgization demonic. But they're going to happen anyway, no matter what you, MIRI, the Taliban or the Amish think about it. And no, humanity won't be able to "control" it, any more than we have been able to control computers, the Internet, cars or electrical power in a carefully planned-out way.

Evolution isn't about control — it's about the wonderful, complex, confusing, chaotic, self-organizing emergence of the new. That's how we upright-walking, opposable-thumbed, hyper-cerebral monkeys came about; and it's how the next stage of intelligence on Earth is going to come about as well, in a process sure to involve advanced AI systems.

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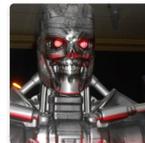
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[See the full post at: [What Do Elon Musk and the Taliban Have in Common?](#)]

October 28, 2014 at 1:30 am #23872

bengoertzel

Keymaster

Serban: Yeah, I have read lots of Nick Bostrom's stuff and also debated/discussed with him and his FHI colleagues in person at Oxford.

See my dialogue with MIRI honcho Luke Muehlhauser at <http://hplusmagazine.com/2012/05/05/how-dangerous-is-artificial-general-intelligence-muelhauser-interviews-goertzel/> ... he thinks basically the same way as Bostrom

I don't think Bostrom's argument is insane. It's somewhat paranoid, in the sense that it takes **possibilities** (with unclear probabilities attached) and then systematically talks about them as if they were **high probabilities**....

My experience with Bostrom and his chums is that they tend to start out with arguments like "AGI will probably kill all humans, if we don't specifically design it not to, in some way that we have no idea how to do now." ... and then when you push them, they end up with weaker arguments effectively amounting to "AGI might kill all humans, and you can't say this is impossible, so we should all be really scared." But the latter argument can be made about an awful lot of technologies.

I would like to emphasize, though, that I like Nick personally and have a lot of respect for his intellect and his leadership skills.

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